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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/07/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: CEDULA APPLICATION DEADLINE EXTENDED, BUT
APPLICATION/DISTRIBUTION PROBLEMS REMAIN

REF: MANAGUA 1630 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Under pressure from Movimiento por Nicaragua (MpN) and other civil society groups (reftel), Nicaragua's National Assembly voted on August 4 to extend the deadline for soliciting the national voter/ID card from August 6 to August 21. The media reported and CSE officials confirmed an immediate drop in applications on August 5 and 6 after potential voters learned they had two more weeks to procrastinate. CSE official Rodrigo Barreto informed Emboffs that the CSE does not plan to postpone release of the official voters list (padron) or make other modifications to the Electoral Calendar based on the deadline change; however, he did claim that the CSE faces a budget crisis because the Assembly did not approve additional funds. NDI and Etica y Transparencia (EyT) officials later reported that only about 20 percent of cedula applicants are receiving their document in a timely manner, delays which threaten the ability of thousands to vote in the November 5 elections. End Summary.

ASSEMBLY VOTES TO EXTEND APPLICATION DEADLINE, BUT NOT ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR CSE

¶2. (C) During a special plenary session on August 4, the National Assembly approved a proposal by President Bolanos that extends the cedula application deadline from August 6 to August 21. The Assembly was pressured on the cedula issue by the Presidency, MpN, and other civil society groups concerned that large numbers of eligible voters, especially young voters, had not yet filed applications (reftel). The long lines of applicants evident the previous week dissipated in most areas of the country as Nicaraguans took advantage of the reprieve to procrastinate.

¶3. (C) Emboffs met with senior CSE official Rodrigo Barreto on August 7 to ask about the implications of the deadline postponement for the Electoral Calendar. Barreto claimed that the CSE has no plans to push back any of the dates that depend on the cedula application deadline (such as the release of the updated padron), but will instead work harder to make up for the delay. He stated, however, that because the Assembly failed to approve additional funds, and the CSE will have to pay an extra 12-15 million cordobas (\$686,000-\$857,000) to contract employees working on cedula applications, the Council will not have funds to pay salaries in October and November. Barreto also confided that the pressure to issue cedula has caused some CSE employees to approve applications without fully vetting applicants with the civil registry, padron, and police records, which has weakened safeguards against fraud.

NDI: CSE FAILS TO ISSUE CEDULAS EFFICIENTLY

¶4. (C) NDI and EyT officials met with Ambassador and emboffs on August 7 to present a report on cedula issuance and distribution. The report, based on a sample of 500-600 cases, revealed that only about 20 percent of cedula applicants receive a cedula within 90 days (the CSE's self-designated waiting period) of filing their paperwork, though this figure rises to 30 percent for "persistent" applicants. The study also indicated that 43 percent of applicants that enjoyed some sort of assistance from a political party were able to obtain a cedula within that time period (although NDI officials cautioned that this figure is based upon a very small sample). On the positive side, researchers confirmed that valid applicants are almost always immediately entered into the padron.

¶5. (C) NDI officials noted that some local electoral authorities are more efficient at issuing cedula within the 90-day time period than others: from over 60 percent in some Departments to zero percent in others. NDI will focus on these good and bad performers and work with IPES to identify "road blocks" in the cedula process. EyT director Roberto Courtney commented that even the "efficient" authorities will likely not be able to produce and deliver sufficient voting documents before the elections, so the CSE may have to consider other alternatives, such as allowing citizens to vote with a colilla (cedula application receipt).

¶6. (C) Comment: NDI officials requested Embassy's advise on how to present findings and recommendations to the CSE. Ambassador cautioned that

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